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Progress Report
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Since the proposal stage of my jury project I have made enormous progress. I have written and received feedback from my jurors on my interview questions and I have made contact with all but one of my planned interviewees. So far, I have conducted three oral histories: one with Baker Beam, one with Kathleen DiBenedetto, and finally one with Fred Noe. Beginning the process of doing fieldwork, capturing information on tape and interacting with these fascinating people has really reinvigorated me and rekindled my fervor for my project. The stress of preparing for the interviews was weighing heavily on me until I actually spoke with my interviewees, but after that transition my project became a lot of fun.

I conducted my first interview in late October with Baker Beam, Jim Beam's grand-nephew and a retired master distiller. Mr. Beam worked at Jim Beam's Clermont, KY distillery from 1954-1992 and had a lot to say about how the bourbon industry has changed since he started out in it. He was there when Jim Beam first went public and became incorporated, when the distillery operations became computerized, and when it finally grew to the size of a large international corporation. Mr. Beam was also kind enough to share some of his expertise on the distilling process on tape. I was very surprised to find that he was incredibly humble about his own talents and accomplishments.

Unfortunately, I hit a major roadblock with Mr. Beam. After our interview was over, he was hesitant to sign the release form that gave the rights to the interview over to UK and asked me if he might keep the form, look it over, and mail it to me later. In the end, he declined to sign the release form because he feared that some of the remarks he made about Jim Beam could be damaging to his rapport with the company. My plan is to rectify this problem right now by editing out the sections that are objectionable to Mr. Beam in hopes that I can salvage the rest of the interview. I am currently waiting on a reply from Doug Boyd at the Oral History Center about whether someone at the Center can do this editing for me.

Even if Baker Beam's interview turns out to be excluded from my final product because of this snag, I learned a lot from this interview because it was my first. It was my first try at using the recording equipment and at conducting an oral history and I learned what my weaknesses are and how I needed to improve in the next interviews. My jurors, Bill Marshall and Debra Watkins both listened to the interview and gave me excellent constructive criticism. The most valuable advice they gave me was that I should be more ready to improvise follow-up questions when interviewees present me with an opportunity to do so.

My next interview with Kathleen DiBenedetto, a marketing executive at Jim Beam, took place in mid November. Reflecting on my performance during this interview, I feel that I really put Bill and Debra's advice to good use this time around. My interview with Ms. DiBenedetto turned out to be much longer than the interview with Baker Beam even though I went into it with fewer planned questions. This is probably because I was more relaxed and I really listened for opportunities to ask good secondary questions. What I really enjoyed about interviewing Ms. DiBenedetto was the stark contrast between her high-energy demeanor and Baker Beam's humble, reserved disposition. Her

perspective as a modern marketing executive also contrasted with Mr. Beam's perspective as someone who was involved only in the production side of the business and who is comparatively old-fashioned.

My third interview was with Fred Noe and I conducted it over Thanksgiving weekend. Following this one, I felt very satisfied with the improvements I had made to my interviewing skills. My interview with Mr. Noe was almost two hours long, much longer than the prior two. The reason for this was that by this time, I was very comfortable making up secondary questions on the fly. It was also especially long because Mr. Noe was quite talkative and responded in wonderful detail to my questions. I had to omit some of my planned questions during this interview in the interest of time and so I have a lot of material to use for a future follow-up interview with Mr. Noe. The content of this interview was exceptionally valuable to my project and very interesting. Fred Noe is the most visible family member who is at Jim Beam right now and has recently received the honor of having his picture added to the label. He enlightened me about what his job is at Jim Beam, how times have changed at Jim Beam since his father, Booker Noe, was master distiller, and about the challenges Jim Beam faces as it grows larger and as its market becomes increasingly international. He was also very candid with me about the role of the family legacy at Jim Beam (Baker Beam was a little too candid about this same topic and that was the reason why he wouldn't sign the waiver).

The variety of different perspectives and information that I gathered in my first three oral histories makes me confident that I selected my interviewees wisely, and I think that this will continue to be the case as I conduct the next four interviews. I plan to complete the remaining interviews over winter break. My remaining interviewees are Jimmie Russell, master distiller of Wild Turkey; Dixie Hibbs, former mayor of Bardstown and amateur historian; Jim Beam Noe (my father), plant manager at Jim Beam and Beam family genealogist; and Ruby Smith, retired distillery operator. I don't foresee any obstacles to arranging interviews with the first three people on this list, but Ruby Smith may pose a problem. She is the person I have yet to contact- the letter I sent to her home address was returned and her phone goes straight to voicemail. As of now, I have not yet given up on her because I have a contact in her hometown, Shepherdsville, who is trying to get in touch with her. If all else fails, I can look for another retired hourly-wage worker to replace her. It is very important to me that if I cannot interview Mrs. Smith, that I replace her so with another woman so that I get a female perspective on the male-dominated bourbon industry in Kentucky.